

Galerie Gisela Capitain is delighted to present its first exhibition of works by the British artist Richard Smith.

The exhibition focuses upon two specific periods of work within Smith's career: his early paintings from the 1960s and the so-called »kite-paintings« from 1972 onwards. Both groups of works reveal Smith's fundamental concerns, as well as potential solution strategies, allowing the viewer to appreciate the radical development his work underwent.

Commercial packaging, large-format billboards, glossy magazines, cinema, and pop music are the kinds of prominent references that Smith encountered when in New York and subsequently drew upon in his early, highly colourful paintings. Starting from Marshall McLuhan's theory of mass communication, he integrated pop culture into his work in an indirect and conceptual manner rather than in a manifestly iconographic way. Acknowledging the ambitions of Pop Art on the one hand and those of abstract expressionism on the other, Smith arrived at a highly individual synthesis of these divergent styles, which seemed incompatible for the majority of his contemporaries.

Arising from the intensive engagement with the dialectic of surface and volume, Smith's »kite-paintings« continued to develop compositionally along the axes of form, surface and shape towards the highest degree of subjectivity and optimal formal arrangement. From 1972 onwards, Smith began to move away from conventional supports, using aluminium rods to stretch the canvas. These stretcherless canvases effectively became membrane-like surfaces. Separable elements were carefully fused within this new format. Ephemeral installation materials, such as rods, string and adhesive tape are not merely functional, but essential components of work.

The most striking characteristic of Smith's work is the synthesis of contradictory artistic methods. Subverting convention, he delivers ambiguous solutions both in his early paintings and in the »kite-paintings«. The preoccupation with simple geometric shapes and the respectful approach to the single image invoke the classical dogma of American abstract art from the 1960s. At the same time, Smith acknowledges his romantic roots, his need to work with the surface, to affect a balance between the heavy and the light, to place an emphasis on the handmade, to uphold art-from-life as a source, to combine the serious with the light-hearted and to celebrate Epicureanism with fearless gusto.